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Le temps
de la Bible

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Bordreuil and Briquel-Chatonnet are both historians, directors of research at the CNRS (National Council for Scientific Research) and working at the Institute of Semitic Studies of the Collège de France in Paris. The present book *The Time of the Bible* was first published by Fayard Press in 2000 and appears now in the prestigious collection Folio histoire by Gallimard Press, which is the best proof of the quality of this book.

Although they are historians, their intention is not to write a history of Israel, to prove what real movements of people could correspond to the history of the patriarchs, to decide on the historicity of Moses or on the development of David's reign. They try to discover the intention of the redactor who has put such stories together. Biblical studies have been dominated by historical-critical methods; a good example is the Documentary Hypothesis to explain the origin of the Torah. This approach has often led people to consider the Bible a patchwork of all kind of traditions, documents, or sources. The two authors accept that the Bible has a long history, but they stress above all the precious work of the redactors, who have put it into its present format according to a coherent process. The Hebrew Bible as we now have it dates from the period after the Babylonian exile; the two centuries of the Persian domination in Judah (539–331) are a decisive

moment in its elaboration. In this final product older texts have been rewritten and have all been read from the perspective of this period. Its purpose is to found the existence of an ethno-religious community, of a group of people no longer subject to an earthly king but to Yahweh, king of the universe and only God. The authors of the Bible express thus the ideas of the community that, while telling its history, define its identity, affirm the relationships between its members, put into place its cultural institutions, and justify its existence through its history.

The first part of book, “The Foundations of an Identity,” is divided in four chapters. The first, entitled “The Apparition of a People,” covers the problem of the conquest. The second, “The People Gives Itself a Common Ancestor,” studies the stories of the patriarchs. The third, “The People Gives Itself a God,” presents the story of Moses, the exodus, and the divine name Yahweh. The fourth, entitled “Anthropology and Mythologies,” examines the stories of Gen 1–11. In this section the authors frequently refer to the Yahwistic and Priestly documents, for instance to explain the flood. Like many scholars, they classify the paradise story (Gen 2–3) as Yahwistic, but they, surprisingly, date that from the time of Hezekiah (140 n. 2).

The second part of the book focuses on “The Birth of the Monarchy.” The authors stress how the Bible speaks first of the people and only later of the monarchy, contrary to Mesopotamia and Egypt, who speak first of their monarchies. The Bible does so since the monarchy has been a failure, and consequently, even without a king, Israel as a people has been able to continue and to subsist after the exile. The first chapter of the second part of the book opens with “The People Gives Itself a King.” Note how several chapters have as title “The People Gives Itself. . .”; this clearly indicates the perspective of the two authors. The next chapter, “The Founder,” studies David, in comparison with Saul, and the third chapter, on “Solomon,” includes some interesting data on wisdom and the temple.

The third and last part of the book is entitled “Israel Enters into History.” The title itself illustrates the position of the two authors. They affirm that with the birth of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah in the ninth century, we enter into history, because now the story rests on real historical foundations. The first chapter of this part is “Two Separate Kingdoms.” It is followed by a chapter on “Royal Prophets and Prophets of God,” an interesting study on biblical prophecy itself and in comparison with extrabiblical prophecy. The authors also provide enlightening remarks on how the oral preaching of the prophets became a written text. The next chapters are “The Last Century of the Kingdom of Israel”; “Under the Shadow of Babylon”; and “The Return and the Second Temple.”

The outline of the book illustrates the approach of the two authors. It is a study of the whole Bible, which they believe has been written or rewritten from the experience of the exile, God's last punishment for Israel's unfaithfulness. Only repentance can renew the covenant. The Bible, the sacred history, is a "theology of the history." The two authors wrote their book for nonexperts, but experts will also enjoy reading it. The authors are well informed on what exegetes say about the biblical texts, and being themselves historians in Semitic studies, they were thus in a good position to present a beautiful synthesis. They confront continually the biblical texts with the findings of archaeology and with old inscriptions. It certainly takes a lot of courage to try to cover the whole Hebrew Bible and all these historical periods. Their study is quite balanced, far from taking everything in the Bible as historical and at the same time not rejecting everything as being purely fictional. Since they have to take a position in so many areas, several of their positions are therefore questionable. For instance, in the highly disputed question concerning the origin of the name Yahweh, they opt for a Qenite origin (101).

The book contains a few simple but clear maps. A bibliography is provided for each chapter at the end of the book. It is of course totally impossible to do justice to all the research done on the whole Bible, so they had to be selective, and generally they provide good sources, but at times they could have listed more up-to-date studies. For instance, on the Samson story they give only the book by Crenshaw and two articles by Margalith. One wonders why they did not give the more recent articles by Margalith (418). For the important notion of the covenant, the only study referred to is the 1978 work by D. J. McCarthy of (433). At times they use a terminology that is not the most usual. For instance, they speak of "the narrative books" (308) instead of the more common term of "the historical books." They divide between the "first prophets" and the "second prophets" (308) instead of the "earlier prophets" and the "later prophets." They often use the term "henotheism"; once they say that this is identical to "monolatry" (399).

This is a book that I recommend to students but also scholars can enjoy reading this book. Not too many people today dare to write such a synthesis. These two authors are therefore to be congratulated and thanked for the tremendous work that must have gone into the research to produce this fine book.